

SERVICE TO THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED



VISIONS NEWSLETTER WINTER 2018

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Director's Comment by Gaye Mattke

As we begin planning activities for 2018 I would like to offer a great resource for information about SBVI activities and achievement in 2017. The Board of SBVI Annual Report was submitted to Governor Dugaard and the Rehabilitation Services Administration at the end of 2017. In addition to information about performance of agency programs, you will find success stories and quotes from satisfaction surveys. You can find the report on the SBVI website or contact SBVI to request hard copy or alternative formats. <http://dhs.sd.gov/service-to-the-blind/default.aspx>

SBVI experienced some fluctuations in the number of people served in the vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs in 2017. However, we were pleased to see an increase in the total number of people who received services through a variety of opportunities for services through the division. We continue to emphasize provision of assistive technology services and devices and over one thousand people benefitted by obtaining devices and training through SBVI last year.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State plan requires a two year update to be submitted by March 15th. I invite you to review the current plan on the SBVI website and submit suggestions for updates. We will be sharing the draft plan updates and hosting public forums prior to submitting to the Rehabilitation Services Administration by the March 15th deadline. Please see announcements in this edition of VISIONS for date and times for a video conference public forum on March 2nd. Sites will be available across the state with a call in option for those who do not want to go to a video conference site at a state office.

The 93rd South Dakota legislative session kicked off with the State of the State on Tuesday, January 9th. The final day of session is March 9th with “veto day” on March 26th. The Legislative Research Council (LRC) website is an excellent resource to follow bills, listen to committee and floor testimony and access information on agency budget requests. The web address for the LRC is: <http://www.sdlegislature.gov/> The Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities is another resource; they track bills that may impact citizens with disabilities and have a bill tracking document on their homepage at: <https://sd-ccd.org/>

Staff Updates

Jennifer Geffre, Orientation and Mobility Specialist at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind completed all requirements to obtain her Master’s degree from Western Michigan University. She also passed the certification examination through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals. After almost two years of attending classes on-line, studying, and working full-time, Jen accomplished her goal of orientation and mobility certification. Congratulations, Jen!

Kellie Hauglid, SBVI senior rehabilitation counselor, accepted the position of program specialist at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and began her duties October 9. This position was vacant after Lori Kwasniewski resigned to accept a position with the Sioux Falls School District as an employment specialist. Kellie currently is on maternity leave and will return in early February.

Ramona Kauk is a Senior Rehabilitation Counselor, who was hired on January 9, 2018 to replace Kellie Hauglid in the Sioux Falls SBVI local office. Ramona completed her Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling through South Dakota State University, and passed her certification test to become a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor in August 2017. Ramona was previously working as an employment specialist at Career Advantage in Brookings, and has worked closely with VR counselors in the Brookings office. With her education and work experience as an employment specialist, Ramona is a great addition to the Sioux Falls office. She will be covering territory in the Brookings and Madison areas, as well as Sioux Falls. Please welcome Ramona to the agency!

Board of SBVI Update

The Board of SBVI sponsored the annual Governor’s Awards recognizing employment of people with disabilities along with the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation in October. Two members of the Board of SBVI were honored at the annual award ceremony. Koni Sims received the Outstanding Citizen with a Disability Award and Tami Francis was recognized with the Outstanding Employee with a Disability Award. If you’re interested in nominating someone for the 2018 Governor’s Awards, contact a member of the Board of SBVI or an SBVI staff person. See more on the Governor’s awards in the SBVI Annual Report. The next Board meeting is scheduled for March 23rd in Pierre. All meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome.

What's Happening with Transition

SBVI has an Interagency Agreement with the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired. The Transition Specialist, Steve Kelsey, provides outreach across South Dakota, promoting SBVI and School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SDSBVI) services. Collaboration between SBVI, the School for the Blind, and local school districts have improved as a result of the Transition Specialist traveling to attend IEP's, meeting with school personnel to provide awareness of SBVI and SDSBVI services to students with vision loss, and encouraging participation of students in transition activities. Examples of these activities include the Youth Leadership Forum; Transition Week at the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind; Catch the Wave; and Transition Forums. Steve works very closely with the SBVI Rehabilitation Counselors to make referrals for VR services and pre-employment transition services to students.

Steve collaborates with the Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP), serves on the Transition Steering Committee, and participates in quarterly meetings with SDSBVI Outreach Consultants. He distributes marketing materials around the state to school districts, students and parents about resources that may benefit them. One resource he has found particularly helpful is the "Supporting Real Lives (Across the Lifespan)" packet provided by Department of Human Services that has all available resources, including how to contact providers for questions. He also meets with special education teachers when he visits school districts, making them better informed of services available and more likely to contact him for any questions or concerns. As a result of these marketing and outreach efforts and Steve's visibility in the schools, Outreach Consultants are referring more students at an earlier age.

Dakota at Home

The Division of Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) within the Department of Human Services (DHS) operates South Dakota's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). The ADRC provides objective information and assistance to help individuals, regardless of age, income, or resources, identify and access available public and private long-term services and supports within their local communities. LTSS is in the process of implementing a public awareness campaign and rebranding of South Dakota's Aging and Disability Resource Directory (ADRC), which will be renamed to Dakota at Home. To learn more about the options and services available through Dakota at Home, please contact 1-833-633-9673.

Employment Rate of South Dakotans with Vision Loss

According to statistics calculated by the Cornell University Yang Tan Institute using the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 data, SD is rated second highest in the nation for employment rate of people with visual disabilities in the US, with a percentage of 64.8%. ND is in first place with an employment rate of 70.8%. We think this is due, at least in part, to services provided by SBVI. One other factor that ensures that South Dakota ranks at the top for is the work ethic of South Dakota citizens with vision loss.

Older Blind Peer Support Groups – Helen Hartman

SBVI has a small network of Peer Support Groups in communities across the state. Some groups are led by volunteer leaders who are interested in assisting the members through low vision education and activities. The overall intent is for the members to remain involved with others who are facing challenging lifestyle changes due to their eye disease. SBVI is going to share information about the groups and the volunteer leaders in this and upcoming editions of the VISIONS Newsletters. If you are interested in starting a Peer Support Group in your community or wish to inquire about the schedule for meetings, please call 1-800-265-9684 for more information. Our first subject has been a leader in peer support in South Dakota for many years and continues to share her time and expertise in Sioux Falls.

Helen Hartman has been involved with peer support since September 1984. She is currently a leader for two groups in Sioux Falls. Her interest in helping others started when she was a young person who dreamed of being a teacher when she graduated from high school. Helen has been visually impaired since October 1966, but her involvement with helping people with vision loss began when she was asked to assist with distributing and organizing low vision items for the South Dakota Association of the Blind Gadgetry Program in the late 1970's. Helen's interest in Peer Support started with Prairie Freedom Center in 1990 when she was involved with writing a grant to support peer support activities in Brookings and Sioux Falls which continued until May 31, 2003, long after the grant funding ended. She continues as a volunteer peer support leader because she realizes the importance of peer support and the need for people to remain connected.

Helen shared that the most significant benefit to being involved with peer support is helping other individuals feel like they're not the only person on earth with vision impairment. As people become more involved with support groups, she's seen their confidence increase, along with the skills they need to live independently. Helen believes the training that individuals receive from the rehabilitation teachers allows their confidence to increase even more. Helen notes there is an important educational component of peer support which is to help people realize they can meet the challenge of being visually impaired.

Her favorite thing about peer support is hearing and seeing how members communicate with each other once they realize they're not the only one with vision loss. As people increase in their confidence, they are more expressive of their experiences and are open to sharing their experiences during open forum peer support meetings. Helen wants others to know they are not the only person with vision loss. It's important for them to know there are resources available for people with similar vision loss. Peer support can occur in through individual meetings or through group meetings and she has found that it is important as a leader to call new members to explain what will happen at the upcoming meeting; be welcoming of others and ensure spouses, family members or senior companions are also welcomed to attend the meeting.

Seeing AI

In July 2017, Microsoft released an iPhone app called Seeing AI. Built for individuals who are blind or have visual impairments, this free download app from the Apple App Store, can describe the world around the user, utilizing artificial intelligence to recognize people, objects and text. Seeing AI utilizes a device's built-in camera to "see" the people and places around them, recognizing people's age, gender, emotions, and vocalizing the names of friends, as well describing the features of the locations and surroundings. Seeing AI can also identify currency, recognize documents, speak text, and scan barcodes to identify products. Additionally, Seeing AI can read handwritten text including cursive writing, as well as generate audible tones corresponding to the brightness of your surroundings and describe perceived colors. With so many features, Seeing AI can complete multiple tasks with one app and eliminate the need for multiple applications.

Aging Gracefully Expo (AGE)

For the past two years, the Aging Gracefully Expo has been organized as an event to provide education and information using technology from urban areas to participants in rural communities across South Dakota. Topics at the AGE event are intended to raise awareness regarding resources that are available to assist individuals to remain in their home or communities longer as they age. Presentations include a variety of wellness opportunities including information to increase physical activity, opportunities to volunteer and information to make better choices regarding health care and nutrition options.

Using webcast technology, audiences in rural communities are able to watch and interact with presenters in Rapid City. In 2017, Attorney General Marty Jackley spoke about fraud and scams in South Dakota and Kathi Herreid with the Alzheimer's Association spoke about memory loss, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

AGE is an event sponsored by South Dakota State University Extension, Consumer Protection with the Office of the Attorney General and local community organizers. Plans are underway to hold the event on September 15, 2018. If you are interested in being a partner and having this event held in your local community, you can contact Leacey Brown, Gerontology Field Specialist with SDSU Extension at (605) 394-1722 (ext.214) to volunteer or to find the communities where AGE will be held in South Dakota.

Announcements

Disability Awareness Day at the Capitol – February 14, Pierre

Video Conference Public Forum – Friday, March 2, 3:00 – 4:30 (Central Time) with sites at the following locations:

- Aberdeen – Dept. of Human Services & Dept. of Labor and Regulation
- Brookings Dept. of Human Services
- Huron – Dept. of Labor and Regulation
- Pierre – Dept. of Labor and Regulation
- Rapid City – Dept. of Human Services and Dept. of Labor and Regulation
- Sioux Falls – Dept. of Human Services and Dept. of Labor and Regulation
- South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind
- Watertown – Dept. of Labor and Regulation
- Yankton – Dept. of Labor and Regulation
- To call in: 1-866-410-8397 Conference Code: 6057736282

Board of SBVI Quarterly Meeting – March 23, Pierre

Dakota Chapter AER – April 18 -20, Aberdeen

SBVI Public Forum – April 27, 4:00 – 5:30 (Mountain Time) Rushmore Hotel & Suites, Rapid City

National Federation of the Blind of SD Convention – April 27-28, Rapid City

Transition Week - Rehabilitation Center for the Blind – June 10 – 14, Sioux Falls

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